



# Building training systems for the manufacturing sector

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## General Note

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## ABSTRACT

Training is the hall mark of a good management, which is generally overlooked. Potential of the employees in itself does not guarantee unless they are trained which is vital for their success. Today, technical training is no longer enough. The focus is on improved service, higher quality or better productivity, team building, decision making, or communications, which are strategic in nature.<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on case study approach. It captures the different developments that have taken place in XYZ Agri Technologies, a 20 year old company in moving from basics to training excellence. The data is collected from the trainees of all training programmes for three years namely 2010-11 to 2012-13. The participants of the programmes are the sample from whom the data is collected after every programme, covering new and existing employees of the organization across all the levels. Against the background of several findings, the paper ends up with certain suggestions on commitment & accountability for training, key result areas, functional effectiveness and so on.

## 1. THE CASE

XYZ Agritechnologies is a 20 year old company. It produces and sells products that enable plant growth and protection with 3 manufacturing facilities, a state of the art R&D centre with its corporate office in the southern state of AP. It exports technical and has PAN India presence for its formulation business. It has more than 1000 employees on its rolls. Despite its 20 years history, XYZ

Agritechologies has commenced its people development practices only in the last 3 years with the commencement of the training wing. The objective behind setting up such an initiative was part of the larger scheme of organization development with focus on attitude building. The focus areas were safety, first aid in the plants. There was no specific initiative on skill building nor were specific programmes designed for the front line people. Most people were trained on the job with specific review focus on task completion. There was minimal or no monitoring of the learning progress. This was applicable to the front line people as well.

### **Need for the study**

This study was undertaken to understand the training journey so far, what enabled the function and what are the challenges in sustaining the intervention, the role of quality in training and the processes involved to examine the effectiveness of the function.

### **The objectives of the study**

#### ***To understand***

- What prompted the company to introduce training function?
- How did the company transition to training systems?
- What are the critical success factors in making a training system successful?

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

Case study method is chosen to understand the dynamics in operationalizing training systems for performance improvement and sustained efforts. This study provides insight about setting up a training function from zero base, evolving processes & procedures to drive them, ensuring quality of training while managing costs without compromise on the quality of training, ensuring training participation, managing records and documentation to monitor the performance along with compliance to the quality parameters and energy release of people through learning.

### **Sampling for research**

The participants of the programmes are the sample from whom the data is collected after every programme, covering new and existing employees of the organization across all the levels.

### **Tools for Data Collection**

A simple structured questionnaire was administered to each of the participants. The questions were designed with responses on a 5 point rating scale to suggest satisfaction levels over the programme in term of meeting expectations, the content of the programme, the delivery of the programme, the aids used during the programme, and the exercises or their own participation levels. The open-ended questions involved the learning from the programme, implementation of the learning and suggestions for improvement and information on any previous programmes attended during the year to monitor the number of training days for a participant. The entire year's training data is collated and the output is presented together as tables and graphs.

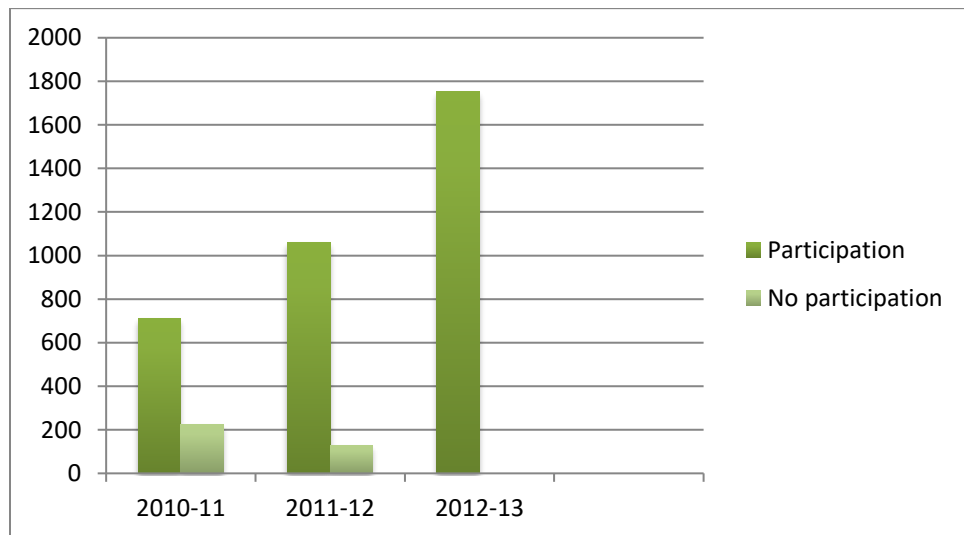
The promoters of the company wanted that organization development focus be brought in and training as a tool for attitude building. With this background, the training function was set up. With the setting up of the training function, the first step was to find out the training needs since there was no formal appraisal system that provided for training needs identification. It was challenging to connect it with business or functional needs. The other challenge was in driving training across the organization with a two-member team. So each of the functional heads were asked to provide direction, about what exactly was the training need with a brief on what could have prompted for such a choice. Lack of perspective and the victim mentality emerged as two vital reasons which made them believe that attitude building was a requirement. The other challenge was in driving organization-wide training given the size of the training function. It had just about 2 people while one played an active training delivery role, the other played a supportive role by coordinating for training nominations and managed training data. With the end of the first quarter, the support resource left the organization and the training head was solely accountable for the function with no support.

The budget was approved at the beginning of the financial year. The training policy strangely was accepted but never formalized, nor circulated. However, as the season progressed and the collections became a challenge, cost cutting efforts began on several fronts and training was the first casualty. In the mean while, training activity was suspended based on the opinions of a few people. The training budgets were trimmed down to ¼ of the originally approved budget by the second quarter end. The other challenge stemmed from the seasonal nature of the business which left the formulation business, be it the plant or the sales force totally under business pressure leaving little scope for training.

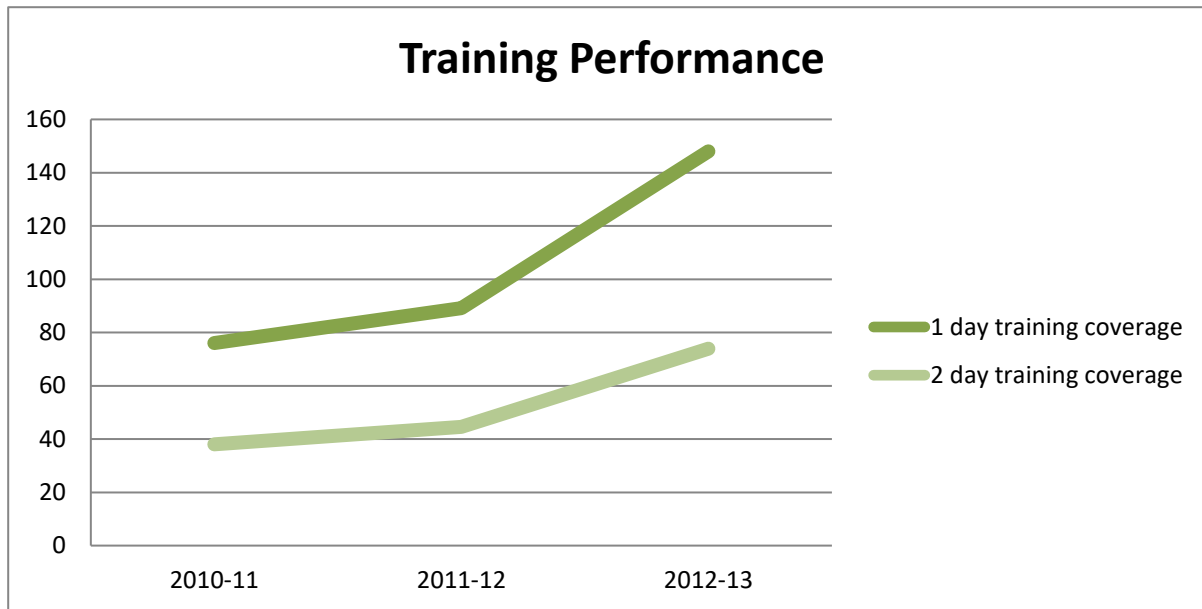
By the time it was the third quarter, training activity was revived. The target was the sales force, which never had any exposure to formal off-the-job training. The entire sales force of more than 300 people was divided into clusters across locations. An external faculty was invited with focus on sales training. Combined with sales training were the behavioral inputs by the internal faculty or the training head. By the end of the financial year, at least the 6 of the 10 clusters were completed. The rest of the training was to be completed in the lean period before the season commencement or after the season. The pressure built from the formulation unit too with the small window available for training interventions due to the seasonal nature of the business and the demand for products.

In the meanwhile, the bigger manufacturing unit ran into labour problem and brought the entire exports business to a standstill. Training activity naturally came to a halt, much as the plant head insisted that training interventions must be ongoing & is the need of hour. He never ensured people participation but talked about the limitations of manpower. At the end of every programme, feedback was collected. It was collated and sent to the concerned faculty for necessary modifications, the concerned functional heads on how their team received the training intervention. Attendance was monitored vis-à-vis nominations. With the single member function, training administration, coordination along with delivery became challenging in terms of collation of data. The end of the financial year saw more than 70% of the people participate in training. The challenge yet remained in increasing the number of training days to 2 per head. About 30% went through 2 day training. Only 1/3 of the originally proposed budget was spent to complete the training with a small overrun on trimmed down budget as the sales teams' travel and stay were factored into training costs. A proposal was developed for creation of training centre, the concept appreciated but never implemented. Training was seen as a mere activity rather than a differentiator. People from progressive organizations appreciated the efforts but were very few in numbers. The other programmes at the sales locations were completed with the beginning of the financial year.

### Overall Training participation



Training days	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
1 day training coverage	76.043 %	89.16%	148%
2 day training coverage	38.021%	44.58%	73.92%



### 3. FINDINGS

- Sustaining training activity is a challenge when it does not fall typically under the day to day business purview
- Improving training participation
- Process compliance at every location
- Using training as a tool for performance improvement
- Commitment to learning from the individual and the reporting manager
- Evaluation of learning through periodic review & feedback to help the individual
- Scope to practice learnings at the workplace, freedom to test the learnings at workplace is necessary
- Documentation for Quality audits
- Internal faculty commitment & effectiveness
- Training administration is critical to the functional effectiveness

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- The commitment & accountability for training should flow from the functional head, while the training function can be the process owner. This will help them to shift focus from that of mere activity orientation to building competencies
- Training participation has to be part of every employee's key result area
- On-the-job training has to be every leader's accountability and review of the learnings for functional effectiveness
- Every employee after the training must be allowed to practice the learnings, and given feedback to understand the training effectiveness
- Every leader must be involved in the employee's development process
- Internal faculty must be invited on voluntary basis, put through a selection process to be part of such an initiative and rewarded for the good work
- Training process compliance is necessary to bring all the logical steps into the training fold

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